

Lumbering had its heyday in county

Lumbering was, at one time, the most important industry in Clark County.

About 1909, Coast Magazine reported that the county had approximately 200,000 acres of timberland, comprising 2,500,000,000 board feet of timber.

The county's lumber was of excellent quality and was mostly red and yellow fir, cedar and hemlock. The rich loam of the area not only supported fine tree growth, but logged-off areas made for rich farms.

The largest timber company in the county was the Weyerhaeuser Timber Co., which operated mostly in the northern part of Clark County. The largest company of the Washougal area was the DuBois Co., which set up dams along the Washougal River to catch logs which were sent downriver.

Colonel Michael T. Simmons built a shingle mill — the first industry in the Camas-Washougal region — in 1847. He traded its wares to the post at Fort Vancouver for cloth, ammunition and other frontier needs.

The first Northwest sawmill — and the first one built west of the Mississippi — was erected in 1827 at Fort Vancouver by the Hudson's Bay Company, a British group. The saw was hand-pulled by Hawaiian workers, and much of the lumber produced was shipped to Hawaii.

The first steam sawmill in the Northwest was built in Portland at the foot of what is now Jefferson Street. It turned out 500,000 board feet of lumber in its first year and is commonly recognized as the "granddaddy" of today's Northwest lumber industry.

Three aspects — the completion of the Northern Pacific Railroad in 1882, the lowering of its rates to the east in 1894, and the opening of the Panama Canal in 1914 — stimulated growth in the area's lumber industry. Washington became the leading state in lumber production in 1905 and, in 1926, the state produced more than 7,546,000,000 board feet, or 20 per cent of the national total.

A vital difference in this industry from past to present is its regionality. In the industry's infant days, most lumber produced in the Northwest was used in this region. Now, eastern markets use most of the product.

From lumbering's beginnings in the state, around 1850, until 1900, when railroads became more feasible for overland transport, this regional consumerism thrived. But in a relatively short time — by 1934 — the state was using only 26 per cent of its production. The remainder was used overseas or in the eastern United States, and a new industry was born in the Northwest.

But all was not profit and serenity for the area's lumbermen. The International Workers of the World — commonly known as "Wobblies" — came on the scene and

opened halls in Portland, Seattle, Tacoma and Spokane. By 1907, the group felt strong enough to challenge the Northwest lumber industry.

They struck first in Portland that year and forced all but one of 12 sawmills in the town to close. The strike was broken, and the organization spent the next nine years regrouping and struck again, this time in Everett. When the fighting ended with anti-IWW millworkers in the town, seven were dead and 68 were wounded.

In 1917, the Wobblies staged the greatest strike in

lumber history. Eighty-five per cent of camps and mills in the Pacific Northwest were out of production. Sabotage was commonplace: logging trains were derailed, saws were broken and forest fires mysteriously started.

But the strike was broken, and many IWW organizers fled the country after the government intervened on the behalf of the Army, which needed spruce for airplane construction. Boss lumbermen were forced to grant loggers and sawmill workers eight-hour days and better conditions. The assassination of Wobbly

leader Wesley Everest in Centralia ended the organization's control of the logging industry in 1919.

National forests in the Lower Columbia region — including the part of Oregon which is drained by the Willamette Valley — have an annual allowable timber cut of 190,000,000 board feet. Logging has declined in the Camas-Washougal area, in Clark County, and in the state as a whole as these national forests were established and land has been clear-cut.

But the area — Wobblies and all — has used logging and lumber production as a stepping-stone in its steady economic climb.